

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, PDEV, UK
SUBJECT: CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE IN SCOTLAND

1. SUMMARY: IN RECENT MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP), LABOR PARTY AND OTHER OBSERVERS OF THE SCOTTISH SCENE, EMBOFF DISCUSSED THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN SCOTLAND FOLLOWING THE SUCCESSFUL THIRD READING OF THE DEVOLUTION BILL. WHILE DEVOLUTION CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR ITEM OF POLITICAL DEBATE NORTH OF THE BORDER, THE ECONOMIC STATE OF THE UK AND SPECIFICALLY UNEMPLOYMENT IN SCOTLAND HAS EMERGED AS A MAJOR ISSUE. THE SNP CONTINUES TO ENJOY CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH WHILE CLAIMS OF A TORY REVIVAL MAY BE EXAGGERATED, IF NOT UNFOUNDED. THE LABOR PARTY IN SCOTLAND, WHICH HELD ITS ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN DUNOON LAST WEEK, STILL SHOWS DEEP DIVISIONS BETWEEN LEFT AND RIGHT AND BETWEEN DEVOLUTIONISTS AND ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS. END SUMMARY.

2. DEVOLUTION AND THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY LOOM LARGE
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AS THE MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUES DISCUSSED IN SCOTLAND. DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR A SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY SEEM GOOD AT THIS POINT, THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION BILL COULD BE SIDETRACKED IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND CONSIDERABLE RESENTMENT AGAINST THE REQUIREMENT THAT 40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE MUST APPROVE OF THE ASSEMBLY IN A REFERENDUM.

ALL OUR CONTACTS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE 40 PERCENT REQUIREMENT WOULD BE MET, AS SCOTS VOTERS WILL PRESUMABLY TURN OUT IN GREAT NUMBERS IN RESPONSE TO THE "ENGLISH CHALLENGE."

3. ECONOMIC ISSUES NOW CLOSELY RIVAL HOME RULE AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT TOPIC OF CONCERN. THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT IS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN AS 130 SCOTS ARE UNEMPLOYED FOR EVERY 100 OF THEIR COUNTERPARTS SOUTH OF THE BORDER. RECENT POLL DATA ALSO SUGGESTS THAT FAR MORE MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH ELECTORATE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT AND INFLATION THAN WITH THE FUTURE OF DEVOLUTION. ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES IN SCOTLAND ARE CONCERNING THEMSELVES WITH ECONOMIC ISSUES AS THEY APPROACH THE ELECTORAL CONTESTS AHEAD-- THE GARS CADDEN BY-ELECTION IN APRIL, THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN MAY AND THE EXPECTED GENERAL ELECTION IN THE FALL.

4. THE SNP IS STILL RIDING HIGH, THOUGH MANY OBSERVERS WONDER IF ITS MOMENTUM CAN BE MAINTAINED. ANY UNDUE DELAY IN DELIVERING A DEVOLUTION BILL TO THE SCOTTISH PEOPLE WILL HELP SUSTAIN ITS MOMENTUM, AND VICTORY AT GARS CADDEN AND GAINS IN THE MAY LOCAL ELECTIONS WOULD GIVE THE NATIONALISTS GREAT STRENGTH GOING INTO A GENERAL ELECTION. CONVERSELY, A FUNCTIONING ASSEMBLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BY THE END OF THE YEAR AND ELECTION REVERSALS WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE PARTY HAD PEAKED. AGAIN WE WERE IM- DEMONSTRATED BY ITS MEMBERS AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF AS THE PARTY BECOMES PART OF THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT IN SCOTLAND.

5. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE TALK OF A TORY REVIVAL IN SCOTLAND. A SYSTEM THREE POLL BY THE GLASGOW HERALD RELEASED LAST WEEK SUGGESTS THAT THE CONSERVATIVES COULD EXPECT TO TAKE 30 PERCENT OF THE VOTES IN SCOTLAND, AS OPPOSED TO THE 25 PERCENT THEY POLLED IN THE 1974 GENERAL ELECTION. OUR CONTACTS, HOWEVER, EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM ABOUT A TORY REVIVAL, CITING THE UNACCEPTABILITY OF TORY SOLUTIONS TO SCOTLAND'S ECONOMIC WOES AND THE UNPOPULARITY OF MRS. THATCHER IN SCOTLAND.

6. THE LABOR PARTY IN SCOTLAND STILL CONTAINS WITHIN IT DEEP DIVISIONS BETWEEN RIGHT AND LEFT AND BETWEEN DEVOLUTIONISTS AND ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS. AT THE ANNUAL PARTY CONFERENCE AT DUNOON MARCH 17-20, THE APPEARANCE OF PARTY UNITY WAS MAINTAINED BY THE MIND-CONCENTRATING

PROSPECT OF AN UPCOMING BY-ELECTION AND AN EXPECTED

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GENERAL ELECTION. DELEGATES WERE STIRRED BY A ROUSING
ATTACK ON THE SNP BY GARSCADDEN CANDIDATE DONALD DEWAR
AND WERE SOOTHED BY A SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN
IN WHICH HE PLACED BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC TROUBLES INTO A
LARGER INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND PROMISED TO PURSUE
HIS INITIATIVE OF ACHIEVING A SOUND INTERNATIONAL
APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE WORLD ECONOMY.
CALLAGHAN NOTED THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED BY THE GOVERNMENT
IN THE WAR ON INFLATION, CITING THE CURRENT INFLATION
RATE OF 9.5 PERCENT AS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN THIS
STRUGGLE. HE STATED THAT HE HOPED HIS CONVERSATIONS
WITH SCHMIDT AND CARTER WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO A PROGRAM
TO GET THE WORLD ECONOMY GOING AGAIN, WHICH WOULD BE
NECESSARY TO RESTORE FULL ECONOMIC HEALTH TO THE UK.

7. DESPITE EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE PARTY DIVISIONS,
WIDESPREAD DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S
ECONOMIC POLICIES WAS MANIFESTED DURING THE CONFERENCE.
ON THE FIRST DAY THE PARTY'S LEFT WING SCORED A MAJOR
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VICTORY IN ADOPTING A RESOLUTION WHICH ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT'S HOUSING POLICY. FOLLOWING CONSIDERABLE DEBATE ON ECONOMIC ISSUES IN WHICH GOVERNMENT POLICIES WERE WIDELY CRITICIZED, THE CONFERENCE ALSO ADOPTED A RESOLUTION DECLARING THAT THE UNEMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN SCOTLAND WAS "TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE," A RESOLUTION ADOPTED AGAINST THE ADVICE OF THE EXECUTIVE.

8. A SMALL BUT VOCAL MINORITY OF LABOR ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS ALSO MADE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN TO THE CONFERENCE. LED BY MPS TOM DALYELL AND ROBIN COOK AND TRADE UNIONIST DANNY CRAWFORD, THE ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS LAUNCHED THE "LABOUR VOTE NO" CAMPAIGN TO DISSUADE VOTERS FROM SUPPORTING THE ASSEMBLY IN THE REFERENDUM. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT'S DEVOLUTION POLICIES WERE STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY THE CONFERENCE, THE ANTI-DEVOLUTIONISTS SERVED NOTICE THAT THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THEM.

9. COMMENT: THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF SCOTLAND STILL HOLDS MANY MYSTERIES FOR THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND IT, AS WELL AS FOR THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE IT. THE UPCOMING GARSCADDEN BY-ELECTION (SEPT 1974), THE FIRST BY-ELECTION IN SCOTLAND SINCE THE GENERAL ELECTION OF OCTOBER 1974, WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT TEST FOR THE THREE MAJOR PARTIES IN SCOTLAND. BASED ON THE IMPRESSIONS WE GATHERED LAST WEEK, THE LABOR PARTY WILL HAVE TO MINIMIZE ITS INTERNAL DIVISIONS BEFORE IT CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REVERSE ITS DECLINING FORTUNES NORTH OF THE BORDER. WE ARE LIKEWISE DOUBTFUL THAT THE CONSERVATIVES CAN REGAIN LOST GROUND UNTIL THE PARTY MAKES A MAJOR EFFORT TO REACH SCOTTISH VOTERS WITH ACCEPTABLE POLICIES. WHILE THE SNP MAY

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HAVE LOST SOME MOMENTUM OVER THE PAST YEAR, IT STILL SEEMS TO ATTRACT NEW SUPPORTERS, LARGELY DEFECTORS FROM LABOR WHOSE FRUSTRATIONS OVER DEVOLUTION AND THE ECONOMY CONTINUE.

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